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Famed Submariner, Motivational Speaker Addresses NPS Student Body

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Famed Submariner, Motivational Speaker Addresses NPS Student Body

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Article By: Kenneth A. Stewart



Retired U.S. Navy Capt. and motivational speaker David Marquet stands before a photo of the USS Santa Fe. The leadership lessons Marquet learned while commanding the Santa Fe are the subject of his book, "Turn the Ship Around – How to Create Leadership at Every Level."

Retired U.S. Navy Capt., motivational author, and former commander of the USS Santa Fe, David Marquet, addressed Naval Postgraduate School students, faculty and staff in the university's King Auditorium, Jan 15. Marquet gained notoriety across the Navy when he transformed the Santa Fe and its crew from a reputation for failure to award-winning success.

"When I took command of the Santa Fe, the spark of greatness was hard to find, the crew had been told they were substandard, the previous commander had quit. It was the worst submarine in the fleet," said Marquet.

The leadership lessons Marquet learned while turning around the USS Santa Fe are captured in the book, "Turn the Ship Around – How to Create Leadership at Every Level."

Marquet espouses a philosophy that champions leadership in every sector of the workforce, and the idea that behavior precedes culture.

"The act precedes the thought ... the habit precedes the culture," said Marquet. "If you focus on changing a behavior, the culture will change."

In his tenure as commander of the USS Santa Fe, Marquet says he adopted several unconventional habits. He nearly stopped giving orders, he demanded equal divisions of labor without regard to rank or seniority, and he focused on objectives over instructions.

"The object is not to follow the instructions, the objective is to put out the fire," said Marquet.

His methods raised eyebrows, especially when visiting inspectors found that he had done away with briefings and that his officers did not keep a command-log or "tickler." But Marquet insists that his approach instilled pride and helped subordinates to see both the value of service and the professionalism that is born of personal responsibility.

"Your legacy is what your people achieve, it's not the grade you achieve," said Marquet. "It's the grade that your people achieve in your absence."

Under Marquet's leadership, the USS Santa Fe was rated best in the fleet and won several awards. Many of its officers have gone on to command vessels of their own.

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